



# House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

**JIM TURNER, Ranking Member**

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*Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security made the following statement at a hearing of the full committee with Tom Ridge on the findings of the 9/11 Commission.*

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here with us and for all your exceptional service over the past three years.

Mr. Secretary, as you know, there is strong bipartisan support for your Department. Every member of this Committee wants your Department to succeed and we strongly support virtually all of the initiatives that you have launched over the past 18 months.

Our differences arise with respect to the speed and scope of the Administration's homeland security program. We realize that you cannot snap your fingers and instantly achieve all the security that our times demand. Yet, we continue to have glaring gaps in our homeland security that could be addressed through a more aggressive and robust effort by the Administration. Let me mention a few examples:

\*\* I have recently spent a great deal of time examining security issues along our Southern border. Despite several Administration initiatives, the border is still very porous and most people receive very little scrutiny when they cross through ports of entry. The US VISIT program is a step forward, but it – alone – cannot correct for the numerous infrastructure and technical security shortcomings that exist at – and between – our ports of entry.

\*\* Stopping a nuclear or radiological weapon from entering the United States should be our greatest homeland security priority. However, your Department's program to install technology to screen cargo containers for these materials is woefully behind schedule. Radiation portal monitors will not be installed at all our seaports by December, 2004, as promised. And under the current budget, it may be many years before these devices are available on the Southern Border. This is unacceptable.

\*\* The 9/11 Commission identified the failure to screen air cargo as a serious vulnerability in our aviation security system. In response to events in Russia, your Department ordered that all air cargo be screened for flights to and from that country. Consistent with this measure, it seems to me that 100 percent screening can be accomplished. It is just a matter of having the desire and will to devote the necessary resources to get it done.

\*\* Chemical plants have been characterized as "pre-positioned weapons of mass destruction." Yet, the Department has visited only a couple dozen of the hundreds of chemical

plants that present a serious threat to their surrounding communities. There has not been a single hearing in the House of Representatives on the Administration's proposal to strengthen security at these plants. Clearly, if this legislation were a priority for the Administration, the bill would have passed the House long ago.

\*\* Providing effective communications systems for our first responders has been identified as a top priority for your Department. Special "patch kits" have been developed, and additional frequencies identified, but improvements have still not been seen nationwide. Also, more resources are needed to ensure first responders can communicate with one another. Remarkably, the Administration's budget eliminated the only grant program for interoperable communications in existence, and cut other programs that could be used to address this critical need.

In sum, even though we know that al-Qaeda continues to plot attacks against the homeland, we are not moving as quickly or as strongly as we should to close these security gaps. We have the resources to do so; it is just a matter of the Administration's priorities.

Before I close, Mr. Chairman, I just want to note that with the amount of time the Secretary has available, all the Members present may not be able to ask questions. I would ask that we strictly enforce the five-minute rule and that a follow-up hearing be scheduled in the event the Secretary must leave before each member has been recognized.

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